**What is the definition of evaluation?**

* Throughout the chapter, the authors focus on the importance of evaluation in terms of ‘measuring the value, merit, or worth’ of the program/
* Evaluation provides those seeking answers (stakeholders) a means to see how the process/program can either be improved (formative) or what the overall benefits of the program/process are, and whether it should be continued, expanded or adopted (summative)

**What is the difference between research and evaluation?**

* Evaluation is used to make a judgement about aspects of part of or the whole program – not meant to add to the general knowledge on a subject, which is the focus of research.
* Good quote from session 1 PowerPoint presentation: “Research seeks to prove, evaluation seeks to improve….” M.Q. Patton
* Research and evaluation differ in purpose (as seen in the previous quote) and roles of researcher/evaluator

**What is the purpose of evaluation?**

* Evaluation can be formal and informal.
* We engage in the process of evaluation on an informal basis in our every day lives; we observe and judge others behaviour. This informal process is unsystematic, and our biases, attitudes and instincts influence our ‘’evaluation” outcome.
* Unfortunately without having some sort of systematic evaluation process decisions that arise out of informal evaluation can either be good or faulty, because of the unsystematic way we have collected our information.
* Authors comment that evaluation is a basic human activity, and it is a means of ‘critical sense making’
* In terms of formal evaluation, there is no agreement on what the ‘purpose’ of evaluation is
* Some believe that the purpose of evaluation is not to determine value, worth and merit (as these authors and many others do), but as an example, as a means to assist decision makers, play a role in the political realm, develop knowledge and to ensure that there is accountability and compliance.

**What is the role of a professional evaluator?**

* Professional evaluators have gained the experience, and understanding how to perform an evaluation in terms of assuring a systematic means of engaging stakeholders, and gathering evidence
* A profession evaluator is also is aware that they come to the table with biases, and in terms of the process they engage in an evaluative process that take this into account
* Professional evaluators are skilled in engaging and interact with stakeholders
* The role that the evaluator plays depends in large part on the context of the situation

**What are those ‘objects’ that can be evaluated?**

* If it is an object being evaluated it is referred to as ‘evaluand’
* If it is a person being evaluated, referred to as evaluee
* Within evaluation, there are subsectors areas:
  + Product evaluation
  + Personnel evaluation
  + Program evaluation
  + Policy evaluation

**What are Formative and Summative evaluation?**

* Formative evaluation is used to determine what improvements can be made in the process/program
* Inclusion of formative evaluation should be written right into the process/program to ensure that it is done.
* Formative evaluation is geared toward the developers of program, individuals delivering program – focus is on program improvement;
* Those object being evaluated in a formative process must be ones in which the administrators of the program/process have control
* Summative evaluation – done for ‘observers, decision makers, stakeholders (and not developers) or those that need the information for valuative purposes or to make the go, no go, decisions
* In terms of summative evaluation, usually done to meet budgeting, legislative type mandates – what is merit of program, should it be expanded, etc
* In terms of the individuals that does a summative evaluation, they must feel that they are free to be forthright with their findings. This may be part of the reasoning behind going with a professional evaluator.

**How is the focus of the evaluation determined?**

* *Needs assessments* will determine the types of questions the evaluation will ask; whether there is a problem or a need that exists, and to describe the problem;
* *Process* will look at how the program is delivered and examine other issues
* *Outcome* looks at describing, exploring and determining what (if any) changes occurred as a result of participation in the program for the individuals, their families, and their community. In looking at outcomes, it is also very important that one determines if there were unintended outcomes that resulted because of the program

**What are the limitations of Evaluation?**

* The use of evaluation is just one tool of many that needs to be used in organizational/societal improvement. It is not the overarching answer to all life’s problems, and it is important to not promise outcomes or results that are unattainable.

**What body or field of study did evaluation develop from?**

* In the early days of evaluation, the newly developing field borrowed from behavioural and social sciences
* Between 1973 and 84 there was an increase in the models of evaluation
* The field of evaluation is multi dimensional – as it grows and learns it will develop into its own realm

**What does the book mean by “role of the evaluator in advocacy”?**

* Important that as a evaluator we recognize our roles as advocates, the importance of listening to all the voices of stakeholders, especially the ones that don’t often have a voice, to encourage dialogue, stimulate public interest and stimulate democracy.

One of the notions that I find of the utmost interest in the chapters reviewed, is the role of the evaluator as an advocate. Prior to reading these chapters, I envisioned evaluation much as Talmage (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004) did; as a means to garner input from students to determine the merit of program offerings; how well the instructor did; and, what, if any, improvements could be made to the program, classroom or curriculum. Ideally, or so I used to think, evaluations should have been used to help programming staff to make improvements to the program and to render decisions about future We have discussed the need for the inclusion of evaluations as part of our process, but as more of a means to gather input regarding instructor abilities rather than program improvement. However, given this new insight, I am embarrassed to admit that that my colleges and I view evaluation as a tertiary component of the programming process, and one that is seldom included in anything we do. Ultimately, evaluations were just not that important. But, that has changed.

Evaluations as advocacy; a means to engender democratic discourse and to facilitate a better society (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004), is this really what evaluation is about? Wow. My mind is racing as I consider how I can include evaluation in a new program we are developing for individuals with low level literacy. How can the knowledge I gain from this course allow me to attempt to include evaluation in a meaningful manner in both a formative and summative context. How can I make it possible to ensure we hear the voices of those generally unheard; how we as administrators can engage in an informed discussion on what is really needed and desired as opposed to what *we* think is needed and desired? How can I gather the required evidence to gain the financial resources required from both the college and the Ministry to support the disenfranchised? Chapter 2 has left me with many unanswered questions, but the yearning to forge ahead in this course to learn how to include evaluation in our process. This is indeed very timely from me.

In terms of the evaluator as an advocate, there are roles and choices that each evaluator makes that have implications for the evaluation outcomes. It is interesting that, in my mind, this is one point where research and evaluation are very similar. Both evaluators, and researchers, influence the outcome of their results based on the methodology they chose, the stakeholders that are included, and those that are not, (likely more so in qualitative research as opposed to quantitative) and, what questions are asked(Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004). However, in considering the advocacy role again, the evaluator must be cognizant of the role they play, and the decisions they make, by providing a clear picture of that being evaluated, so those in the decision making role have a clearly formed idea of what is important, and have the information required to engage in informed dialogue.

As noted earlier, these chapters have left me wanting to know more. I want to know how we at the college can include evaluation as a means to engender discourse; as a means to make decisions based on having a clearer picture of what the reality of the situation is, and not as I commented earlier, what *we think* the problems is. As adult educators, everyday we battle with doing what is best for the student. However, until we are able to make an informed decision, one based on properly gathered evidence obtained through sound evaluation, we ultimately are not doing true justice to our students.

Fitzpatrick, J.L., Sanders, J.R., & Worthen, B.R. (2004). Program E*valuation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.